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ABSTRACT

During 1994 to 1996, 15 school districts in British Columbia, Canada, received proposals to establish alternative public schools of choice based on the effective school model. These became commonly known as "traditional schools." Most of the proposals were denied, but four elementary schools were in existence by early 1998 and three others were approved later in the year. This study analyzed the proposals submitted to support 14 traditional schools. These proposals are based on the beliefs of the proposers that a consistent, structured approach to learning and school accountability is essential. Among the foundational elements proposed for these new schools are adherence to the prescribed curriculum, parent input through a governance council and parent partnership in instruction, with commitment to the values of the school ensured in advance of enrollment of students. The proposed schools planned to emphasize traditional models of instruction, especially direct instruction. Teachers were to have high expectations for students, and the schools were to have strict codes of behavior. The analysis concludes that the proposals match well with effective schools research and fit within the academic press theory of school effectiveness. A large body of research supports the emphasis on parent involvement, and choice of the school is expected to strengthen parent and student engagement. School choice could become a central technique for improving schools in British Columbia. An appendix summarizes elements of the proposals studied. (Contains 3 tables, 2 charts, and 44 references.) (SLD)

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By Dr. Peter Coleman

SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

Dr. William Boyd

In the complex environment of today's information age, the quality of education our children receive is extremely important. Consequently, parents increasingly desire not only a voice in this matter, but a choice of the schools their children attend. The old "one size fits all" approach of some public school systems is increasingly unpopular. Particularly in North America, the demand for more choice of schools is escalating very rapidly, as the dramatic growth of the charter schools movement in the United States demonstrates.

In this context, public school systems that ignore the desires of parents are putting themselves at risk. They need to find and encourage creative ways to permit more choice of schools within the public sector. If they fail to respond with imagination and flexibility to the demands- and threats- they face, they run the risk of having history pass them by.

In light of these considerations, Peter Coleman's thoughtful analysis of a series of proposals for creation of "traditional schools" in British Columbia is very timely and interesting. He shows that the design and conception of these schools are quite consistent with research on what makes schools effective. The fact that most of these proposals were nevertheless rejected by the school boards considering them raises a number of important questions about the basis for these decisions.

Of course, Canadian schools have an excellent reputation overall, and are often assumed to be superior to typical American schools. Still, the desire for a choice of schools seems increasingly evident in Canada as well as in the United States. In providing this analysis of proposals for some distinctive "traditional" public schools in British Columbia, Peter Coleman and the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education have performed an important service: By drawing attention to the details and history of these interesting proposals for new schools, they highlight some of the key issues in education policy today and underscore the need for a more responsive public education system that accommodates and cherishes a diversity of quality learning environments.

Dr. Boyd is a Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University and the author of eight books. His research specialty is in the field of international education policy.

About the Author

PETER COLEMAN

Peter Coleman is a Professor in the Faculty of Education of Simon Fraser University. He holds an Honours BA and an MA in English Literature from UBC, as well as a Doctorate in Education.

His work in public education includes periods as a Teaching Assistant in the English Department at UBC, as a secondary school teacher and Department Head in Prince George, as a Department Head and instructor at the British Columbia Institute of Technology, as Director of Educational Services for the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, and as school superintendent in St. Boniface, Manitoba, a bilingual school district. He also served a term as a school trustee in Surrey, and as President of the Canadian Association for Studies in Educational Administration.

His current research interests as a scholar include various dimensions of the study of educational effectiveness, in classrooms, schools, colleges, and school districts. His recent published work includes a qualitative study of school districts, *Struggling to be Good Enough,* with Linda LaRocque, a handbook for parents on school quality, *Learning about Schools: What Parents Need to Know and How They Can Find Out,* and a report on a six-year study of student commitment and parent involvement, *Parent, Student and Teacher Collaboration: The Power of Three.* He is currently working on a book tentatively entitled, *Pressure and Support: The Leadership of Effective Schools,* which examines empirical work in leadership activities which are associated with school effectiveness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

During 1994-1996, a significant number of B.C. school districts (15) received proposals to establish alternative public schools of choice based on the effective schools model. These became commonly known in B.C. as 'Traditional Schools'. The proposals were put forward by parent groups of substantial size and attracted considerable community support. Most proposals, after going through a lengthy and heated district approval process, were denied. Four elementary Traditional Schools are in existence today in B.C. Recently, three more Traditional Schools were approved for September 1998 and two other proposals are currently under consideration.

Synopsis

In-depth research studies are now underway at several Traditional School sites in B.C. To date, however, the larger context has not been examined. *What is the Traditional School movement? What is it a significant number of parents are seeking that they cannot find in their neighbourhood schools? Do the proposals represent primarily a school choice issue? A school quality issue? Are Traditional Schools a bid for exclusive, elite communities? What does the research say about the promise of this model for school and student success? What do the findings suggest for education policy around alternative choices and meeting parental expectations for public schools?*

This research by Dr. Peter Coleman analyzes 14 original Traditional School proposals whose documents present a rich opportunity to answer these questions.

Defining Traditional Schools

Coleman has distilled the essential characteristics from the proposals and presents the following portrait of the Traditional School model being sought:

> *The proposals are based upon the beliefs of the proposers about the conditions necessary for success, and the appropriate goals for a school. Important amongst these is a consistent, structured approach to learning, and school accountability.*
>
> *The rationale for proposing a new school is the extension of choice - another alternate program. The new school is necessary because of distrust of the existing public schools, which are seen as by some parents as ineffective. Given open access (first come, first served) many parents will choose to enroll their children in the alternate program.*
>
> *The foundational elements in the new school, which is an integral part of the district, are to be adherence to the prescribed curriculum; parent input into decisions through a governance council*

and parent partnership in instruction; parent and teacher commitment to the values of the school ensured in advance of enrollment of students, hiring of staff, and school fund-raising to offset extra costs of setting up the school.

Instructionally, the school will emphasize regular assessment and reporting to parents, and traditional models of instruction, especially direct instruction, which is teacher-centred (as opposed to child-centred), largely concerned with basic skills broadly defined. Teachers will have high expectations for students, and hold them accountable for achievement, including homework.

The climate in the school will emphasize a safe and pleasant environment, with strict code of behavior, a dress code, and a school ethos more competitive than cooperative. The main task of the principal is to develop and sustain this climate. (Coleman, pg. 20)

Coleman's Key Findings

RESEARCH-BASED

- The proposals match up with the effective schools studies. "I conclude the proposers have learned well from the effective schools research". (p.23) "They capture much of what is being said about the differences between ordinary schools and effective schools. There are no guarantees in education, but these schools represent a very good opportunity. "(p.41)

EXPECTATIONS

- "They fit within the academic press theory of school effectiveness"(pg.24) which...."posits a more direct link between school processes and academic outcomes.This theory suggests that schools are effective when they offer demanding curricula and employ teachers whose educational expectations for their students are high."(p.25) "The proposers seem to feel that public schools have got the balance between pressure and support wrong and the model schools being proposed are intended to correct the balance." (p.27)

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

- The emphasis upon 'traditional methods of instruction' in the proposals is in keeping with the Academic Press dimension of the effective schools literature. The emphasis is not universal. "The Kelowna proposal is probably representative of the more general beliefs among the proposers: 'There will be a variety of strategies employed including group work, individual work and whole class instruction depending upon the goals and resources available for the particular lesson.' Such varied strategies are vitally important for dealing with the broad range of curriculum issues covered in the Ministry-mandated curriculum accepted by the proposers." (p.38)

PARTNERSHIP

- "The strength of the connection in the proposals between parent support and school quality is obvious. As one proposal put it, 'Students, staff and parents working together will form a strong team able to provide the best educational experience for every child.' A very large body of research supports this central contention of the proposals." (p.30)

COMMITMENT

- "The comments coded in the proposals describe a process by which parents are asked to commit themselves in advance to school policies to ensure their support. Such support is of inestimable value to teachers." (p.30)

CHOICE

- "Parent commitment to a particular school, demonstrated by choosing, virtually guarantees student commitment. It will go a long way towards guaranteeing school success." (p.32)

GOVERNANCE

- The linkage of parental involvement through the school governance council to instruction is a positive element in the proposals. "If the governance changes were linked to teaching and learning through much more intensive involvement of parents in these activities, my own research suggests that the sense of partnership that emerges from school-based management could be very important to improving schools." (p.36)

Conclusion

These proposals represent a challenge to public policymakers. If the central purpose of public schools is to serve the needs of students, Coleman argues, then choice becomes a central technique for improving schools. "The most important step in school improvement readily available to provincial governments is the introduction of a universal choice policy. The advantages of such a step are immense: my own research suggests that they could include more satisfied parents, more committed students, and hence higher levels of achievement. To accomplish this they need only incorporate many of the elements in these proposals."(p.42)

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INTRODUCTION

The set of proposals for schools of choice to be analyzed in this report was collected by The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, a national research and policy organization based in British Columbia. SAEE commissioned the analysis to identify the major trends and themes in the proposals, and to get a sense of the parallels between these and the scholarly work emerging on effective schools and on parent involvement.

The analysis proceeds by first summarizing the reports in the sequence presented to school district officials. This summary reveals that in the space of two years, 14 school boards received proposals and that the proposals were similar in many ways.

The initial proposal prepared in Surrey was positively received. Most subsequent requests for similar choice schools were denied by school boards.

Even a cursory glance at the proposals reveals that their quality varies considerably. However, some of the most extensive and carefully researched proposals were rejected. Therefore, it seems unlikely that success or failure was associated with the quality of the proposal.

The second stage of the analysis is a content analysis of the individual proposals, using Hyperresearch, a computer program to facilitate textual analysis. This stage reveals the major and minor themes present in the proposals, and allows detailed examination of the parallels among the briefs submitted in the various school districts.

The third, and final, stage includes two components; 1) A comparison of the ideas present in the proposals with recent effective schools research, and; 2) A brief personal commentary on the set of ideas.[1]

[1]As a scholar associated with the public school system for nearly forty years I naturally draw on personal experience; my first twenty years as parent, teacher, school trustee and district administrator (School Superintendent in St. Boniface, Manitoba), and my last twenty years as university professor engaged in training school administrators. However, I try here to justify my commentary; it consists of ideas derived from a careful reading of the literature, and from my own 6-year program of research in B.C. schools on parent involvement (Coleman, in press).

SUMMARIES OF PROPOSALS

This group of summaries is provided to allow some comparisons between proposals. For example, by arranging the proposals in chronological order, influences of early upon later proposals may be examined. The circumstances, setting and response to the proposals can be delineated. Although the 'traditional school' is the focus of this group of proposals, there are variations between them, sometimes captured in the name chosen.To serve these purposes, a standard format for summarizing the proposals was developed.

Proposal 1:

School District: Surrey, No. 36

Date of Presentation to the School Board: April, 1994.

Components of the Proposal: mission statement, description of school organizational structure and characteristics, and 'How is this school different from other schools in the District?'

Type of School Desired: *Surrey Traditional School, Grades K-7*

Media Release: Not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Approved.

Proposal 2:

School District: Burnaby, No. 43

Date of Presentation to the School Board: July, 1994

Components of the Proposal: preamble asserting a set of values regarding parental participation and school quality; mission statement; description of the structure, operating principles, climate, and costs of the proposed school; list of characteristics of a school, repeating some of what has preceded, but also containing some new material.

Type of School Desired: *Burnaby Academic School, Grades K-7*

Media Release: None noted.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 3:

School District: Qualicum, No. 69

Date of Presentation to the School Board: September, 1994.

Components of the Proposal: introduction, the proposal in brief, a statement of National Education Concerns, a model school philosophy, proposal details, implementation, school board concerns, and a bibliography.

Type of School Desired: *Parksville/Qualicum Traditional School*

Media Release: In the form of an Open Letter.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 4:

School District: Abbotsford, No. 34

Date of Presentation to the School Board: Nov. 28th, 1994

Components of the Proposal: structure of the proposed school, objectives, School Handbook. (There is no reference to this Handbook in the proposal, but the inference I draw is that this set of rules and procedures is considered an appropriate model to guide the proposed school.)

Type of School Desired: *Abbotsford Traditional School*

Media Release: Not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Approved.

Proposal 5:

School District: North Vancouver, No. 44

Date of Presentation to the School Board: November, 1994.

Components of the Proposal: introduction; overview; a statement about national education concerns; a statement of the philosophy of the desired school; a detailed proposal; a discussion of implementation issues and School Board concerns; a statement of the benefits for the district; a summary and a considerable list of references.

Type of School Desired: *North Vancouver Alternate School; Grades K - 7.*

Media Release: Press Release attached.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 6:

School District: Squamish, No. 48

Date of Presentation to the School Board: January, 1995.

Components of the Proposal: mission statement; description of the operating structure of the proposed school; and a statement about the benefits.

Type of School Desired: *Traditional model school*

Media Release: A newspaper story about the brief is included.

Response to the Proposal: Deferred (became inactive).

Proposal 7:

School District: Maple Ridge, No. 42

Date of Presentation to the School Board: February, 1995.

Components of the Proposal: A detailed proposal, with summary.

Type of School Desired: *The Maple Ridge Academic School. Grades K-7*

Media Release: Not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Deferred (no action taken).

Proposal 8:

School District: Nanaimo, No. 68

Date of Presentation to the School Board: March, 1995.

Components of the Proposal: a mission statement for the proposed school;a statement about the characteristics of the desired school; a description of differences between this school and public schools in general;a statement of benefits to the district.

Type of School Desired: *Traditional model school*

Media Release: Included.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 9:

School District: Courtenay, No. 71

Date of Presentation to the School Board: March, 1995

Components of the Proposal: summary of request; a statement of philosophy with regard to schooling; a description of the desired school, including statements about operating principles and curriculum; and a statement of "Why Our School Will Be Different".

Type of School Desired: *Traditional model school; population 200 (K-7) or 300 (K-9)*

Media Release: Not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 10:

School District: Cariboo-Chilcotin School District, No. 27

Date of Presentation to the School Board: May, 1995

Components of the Proposal: a mission statement; general description of what was wanted; a Code of Conduct which included description of the desired qualities of the school, and of the responsibilities of students, parents and staff, and a set of very detailed rules for students.

Type of School Desired: *Kwaleen Traditional School, Grades K-7*

Media Release: not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Approved.

Proposal 11:

School District: Chilliwack, No. 33.

Date of Presentation to the School Board: July, 1995

Components of the Proposal: a mission statement; a general description of what is wanted, and a description of the desired qualities of the school.

Type of School Desired: Chilliwack *Traditional Model School, Grades K to 7.*

Media Release: not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 12:

School District: Richmond, No. 38.

Date of Presentation to the School Board: September, 1995

Components of the Proposal: a summary; objectives; statements on Philosophy, Structure, Program Access, Curriculum And Instruction, Assessment, Staffing, Discipline, Facilities, Costs, Implementation, and the Questions And Answers document.

Type of School Desired: *Richmond Alternative School, K-7 (200 students), or K-9 (300 students).*

Media Release: not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 13:

School District: Kelowna, No. 23

Date of Presentation to the School Board: November, 1995.

Components of the Proposal: description of the desired operating principles of the proposed school; a letter requesting Board action; Frequently Asked Questions; Key Characteristics; costs and benefits.

Type of School Desired: *Kelowna Traditional Public School for grades K- 7*

Media Release: One page, with contact number, the gist of the proposal, and the comment that 18 districts are considering (or have considered) such proposals.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Proposal 14:

School District: Fort St. John, No. 60

Date of Presentation to the School Board: March, 1996.

Components of the Proposal: a description of the kind of school desired; a statement on Curriculum and Instruction; "Frequently Asked Questions about Traditional Schools"; a set of "key characteristics"; and a brief summary of what the Board is being asked to do.

Type of School Desired: *Traditional model school, Kindergarten - Grade 10.*

Media Release: Not noted.

Response to the Proposal: Denied.

Summary

This stage has demonstrated the amount of overlap among proposals. It would appears that consultation took place among writers of the various proposals, and borrowings were frequent.

Surrey's successful proposal appears to have been used as a model, as were documents entitled "Frequently Asked Questions about Traditional Schools"; and a set of "Key Characteristics".

The other main point which emerges is the rather narrow time frame of these proposals: the 14 proposals were all presented within a 19 month period. Then the process slowed dramatically. Given the success of some of the proposals, and the existence of some schools of the kinds desired by the proposers, the abrupt drop in activity raises questions that are beyond the scope of this analysis.

A small number of new proposals have since been presented. In Prince George (District #57), two recent proposals have been approved by the district as part of a strategy for diversification and increased public school choice. Langley (District #35), has approved a Traditional Middle School to open in September 1998. Vancouver (District #39) and Richmond (District #38) school boards are currently considering new Traditional School proposals.

ANALYSIS of PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Repetition within and among proposals presented a problem for textual analysis. Initially, I intended to ignore repetitious material within the briefs on the grounds of redundancy. Upon further reflection, I decided this would be a serious mistake. The drafters, in borrowing from others, and repeating ideas several times within the briefs, were giving vent to feelings about the ideas - the repetition was intended to convey the writers' strength of feeling. Furthermore, some of the repetition was clearly strategic. Consider the inclusion of a press release with the brief presented to the Board. These releases often simply repeated what was already stated elsewhere. However, by including a press release the proposers were sending a signal to the school board that they were politically tuned in, that they were aware of the need to get trustee decision-makers thinking about public response to their decision.

Thus in the analysis which follows I have honoured what I believe is the intent of the proposers, and treated repetition as a means of expression and a tactic. Every word in the briefs is given equal weight in what follows.

The purpose of this detailed analysis is to provide the basis for responses to three main questions:

- **Are the proposals generally consistent in advocating a particular kind of school, and what are its features?**
- **Are there unusual features in some school proposals which set them apart from the others?**
- **What relationship is there between the schools advocated here and the 'model school' which emerges from the effective schools research?**

There were two main steps in the analysis: the first consisted of coding the briefs, the second of sorting these codes into categories which revealed the set of ideas contained in the briefs.

In coding, the analyst looks carefully at each 'unit of meaning' in the text, and assigns to it one or more codes which seem to capture the sense - taking the context into account. For example, this passage occurs in the Richmond proposal:

Emphasis would be placed on achieving high academic levels while also instilling a strong sense of educational commitment and goals. This would be done through a regular homework program.

Coding the second sentence took five different codes:'conditions for success', 'homework', 'high expectations', 'student accountability', and 'student support'.

The logic is that for the writers the 'regular homework program' is a condition, a way of reaching the 'high academic levels'; it is also part of the 'high expectations' held, an aspect of 'student accountability', and requires student support from the family, as the comments which follow this passage make clear. This kind of multiple coding is quite common in the submissions.

Particularly difficult decisions have to be made concerning the level of specificity attained, and the treatment of unique or rare codes. For example, 'bussing' occurred twice as a code. On consideration that code was added to a larger category 'budget considerations', since it did not seem from the language used in the briefs to be a major issue. On the other hand, a code 'evaluation of program' occurred only once. Yet the idea seemed quite important to the proposers, within the context, and thus was retained.

Sorting of the codes is a second judgmental process, in which the analyst again tries hard to honour the thinking of the writers of the proposals; it involves creating (and then modifying usually several times) some categories, with constant reference back to the ideas in the coded material.

The codes are sorted into larger categories in accordance with the following rules:

1. **Values/Beliefs of the Proposers (VBP):** All issues concerned with the ideas of the proposers, that is the rationale behind the proposal, or ideas about what makes a good school or a school good, are allocated to this category; it is subdivided into two sets - **School Quality Beliefs** and **Choice Rationale**

2. **Foundational Elements (FE)**: All issues fundamental to the school's nature, determined in advance, and not subject to administrative judgement and change are allocated to this category.

3. **School-wide Features (SWF)**: All issues within the school, subject to school administration and staff decision and implementation, are allocated to this category; it is subdivided into two sets - **Instructional** and **Climate Features**.

4. **Classroom Features (CF)**: All issues concerned with the methods of instruction proposed for the school, and at the discretion of teachers, are allocated to this category; which is again subdivided into two sets - **Instructional** and **Climate Features**.

The resulting allocation of codes is shown in Table 1.

VALUES OF PROPOSERS	FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT	SCHOOL-WIDE FEATURES	CLASSROOM FEATURES
School Quality		**Instructional**	**Instructional**
accountable sch	balanced curric	approach to learning	individual learning
beliefs of proposers	Board/par partnership	appr to reading	phonics
conditions for success	budget considerations	assessment	tch strat varied
child centred practices	funding per stud	basic skills	tchr role
effective sch research	governance council	beyond basics	
goals	integral in district	challenge for good st	**Climate**
model used to plan	parent advisory comm	consistency	teacher modelling
report results to comm	parent commitment	curriculum charac	
school type	parent important	direct instruction	
	parent input	eval of program	
Choice Rationale	parent partnership	high expectations	
access	staff selec criteria	homework policy	
alternate prog	use Ministry curric	mastery learning	
choice		princ role	
choices in distr		report to parents	
community buyin		routines	
distrust of public sch		single grade classes	
enrollment expectat		st accountability	
enrollment sources		st support	
poor schooling in Can		tchr centred instr	
public participation		tchr commitment	
social values		trad. method of instr	
		Climate	
		code of behaviour	
		communicate w pars	
		competition	
		cooperation	
		dress code	
		princ role	
		selfesteem building	
		st participation	
		st rights	
		safe	

TABLE 1: Allocation of Codes to Categories

Although these codes and the thematic areas to which they are assigned are believed to capture the essence of the proposals, there are considerable differences of importance and emphasis. These are indicated by frequency counts for the various codes in *Appendix A.)*

The **'major themes'** are those which occur in all, or nearly all, of the proposals. They usually occur more than once, and occur 8 or 10 times in some briefs. In total, they occur at least 30 times. They reveal the similarities among the proposals.

The **'minor themes'** occur in at least five proposals, and may only be mentioned once. In total they occur at least 15 times. They tend to reveal the differences between the proposals. In recognition of this last element I have restricted discussion of the minor themes to those which introduce a new topic.

There are both major and minor themes in each of the four areas: Values/Beliefs of Proposers; Foundational Elements; School-wide Features; and Classroom Features. Most of the discussion will centre on the major themes. The discussion here is purely descriptive; commentary is developed in subsequent sections.

There are also some codes which occur rarely, and tend to reveal the unique qualities of some of the proposals. These will be referred to occasionally in later sections as illustrations which clarify the nature of the proposals in general.

THE MAJOR THEMES

Group A: Values/Beliefs of Proposers - School Quality

There are three major themes within the first part of Group A. They are coded as 'conditions for success' (of students and schools); and 'goals' (what the proposers hope will be achieved by the new schools); and, 'beliefs of proposers'.

Group A1: 'Conditions for success'

'Conditions for success' occurs in every proposal. The Burnaby statement is cited; it was coded as two separable elements, 'consistent, structured education, with clearly defined standards of academic achievement' and 'A consistent, structured approach to learning. Teacher-centred direct instruction'. One refers to school issues, the other to in-class experience.

> BURN, conditions for success
> Source Material: We believe that children will become good citizens and lifelong learners, that they will be able to achieve their ambitions and compete in world markets, if they are given a consistent, structured education, with clearly defined standards of academic achievement.

> BURN, conditions for success
> Source Material: A consistent, structured approach to learning. Teacher-centred direct instruction.

Statements from Fort St. John illustrate similar ideas. The comparison gives evidence of later proposals borrowing ideas and language from earlier ones.

FSJ, conditions for success
Source Material: We believe that in order to become good citizens and life long learners, children require a structured, consistent environment with clearly defined standards of academic performance and expectations for behavior

FSJ, conditions for success
Source Material: those characteristics that other alternative schools have in common such as a strong sense of educational commitment and purpose, high expectations for both academic work and behavior, regular assessment of achievement, an orderly pleasant school climate, strong instructional emphasis, and consistent efforts by home and school.

The second Fort St. John citation gives a sense of the varied elements incorporated in this code - this list is probably drawn from a summary description of effective schools. The summary occurs again in the Parksville/Qualicum proposal, explicitly identified as conditions in effective schools.

P/Q, conditions for success
Source Material: The conditions in effective schools, that influence improved outcomes are - a strong sense of educational commitment and purpose - high expectations for both academic work and behavior - regular assessment of achievement.

An additional item, mentioned in some of the statements about conditions, concerns parental contributions:

NV, conditions for success
Source Material: Independent schools have maintained a strong parental consensus and commitment, which we believe is also possible within the public school system. The North Vancouver Alternate School will posses that united, focused vision.

Group A2: Goals

The second major code in this group is goals - those things which the proposers believe will be accomplished by the new schools. Sometimes the idea is stated as a mission statement for the school; sometimes as social purposes of education.

CH, goals
Source Material: The Mission of the Chilliwack Traditional Public School is to provide a consistent, structured education with clearly defined standards of behavior and academic achievement that support traditional values of home and society.

MR, goals
Source Material: The purpose of education is to prepare young people for the next stage of their lives. Mastery of basic skills prepares students for secondary school successes and a future within the global economy.

This component is closely associated with the other codes in the group - 'beliefs' and 'conditions'.

Group A3: Beliefs of Proposers

The major code in this group is 'beliefs of proposers'. These tend to be rather consistent. A single illustration will suffice:

> BURN, beliefs of proposers, 2,
> Source Material: We believe that children will become good citizens and lifelong learners, that they will be able to achieve their ambitions and compete in world markets, if they are given a consistent, structured education, with clearly defined standards of academic achievement.

Group A: Values/Beliefs of Proposers - Choice Rationale:

In the second part of Group A, four major themes form a cluster within the category Choice Rationale. They are coded as 'access', 'alternate program', 'choice' and 'enrollment expectations'.

Group A4: Access

Access is universally noted in the proposals. The notion is very simple:

> SQ, access
> Source Material: An open catchment policy would enable any student within the district to enroll on a first-come, first-served basis.

Group A5: Alternate Program

The second is a plea for diversity and has three separate components - maintaining viable public schools, diversity of preferences, and existing opportunities within districts:

> WL, alternate program
> Source Material: The long term health of the education system may depend on multiple choices to satisfy the wide cross section of people and opinions within our society

> NV, alternate program
> Source Material: Parents are seeking alternatives to the public school system as evidenced by increasing numbers choosing home schooling or independent schools. It is important for parents to have a choice within the public school system.

> ABB, alternate program
> Source Material: The Abbotsford school district currently offers educational choices such as French Immersion, Programme Cadre, New Beginnings, Carver Technical Centre (CTC), International Baccalaureate (IB), Career Preparation, Continuing Education (ACE), Advanced Placement program (AP), APEX, etc, and we too would like to have choice for our children.

Group A6: Choice

The third is close to the second, but adds some additional components: the connection between choice and commitment, alternate programs as experiments in finding

out what works, and for whom, and choice as an important characteristic for the disadvantaged:

> FSJ, choice
> Source Material: When parents actively and freely select a school for its approach to learning, the school and those children have increased opportunity for excellence.
>
> KEL, choice
> Source Material: Why school choice?
> More choice schools would offer options to far more students and provide a basis for examining what works in instruction (R&D) as results are studied. It can strengthen the public system by adding diversity with accountability.
>
> KEL, choice
> Source Material: Will this create a two-tiered system?
> It will make choice available to everyone who wants it, not just the wealthy. Choice has given disadvantaged children in poor neighbourhood schools better opportunities.

Group A7: Enrolment Expectations

The final element here is coded as 'enrolment expectations' - the grade levels, size, and expansion plans of the proposers, with a sense of the "market" for their school.

> MR, enrollment expectation
> Source Material: This school will teach children from Kindergarten to grade 7 (adding grades 8 to 12 in 4 consecutive years)
>
> RICH, enrollment expectation
> Source Material: Through minimal media coverage we have at this time an anticipated enrollment of 100 students for the first year of operation. The Alternative Program is also favored by many homeschoolers as their choice for public schooling. We would expect increased numbers following a formal public meeting.
>
> NV, enrollment sources
> Source Material: We forecast 10% of students will transfer from private schools, 10% from homeschooling, and 80% from the public school system

Group B: The Foundational Elements

The themes in Group B form two groups: 'use of Ministry curriculum' and 'integral in district' fit together. The themes 'parent commitment', 'parent input', 'parent partnership', 'governance council' and 'staff selection criteria' are discussed following.

Group B1: Use of Ministry Curriculum

The code in Group B1 is usually conveyed in a simple statement:

> SURR, adhere to Ministry curriculum
> Source Material: We will teach the curriculum the ministry requires
> P/Q, adhere to Ministry curriculum
> Source Material: The curriculum would adhere to the requirements of the Ministry

Group B2: Integral in District

The second code in the group involves a slightly more complex line of argument:

ABB, integral in district
Source Material: The Abbotsford Traditional school would operate as a part of the Abbotsford public school system.

CH, integral in district
Source Material: The School District, in consultation with the interim school council, will carry the responsibility of hiring a principal who shares and affirms the goals and objectives of the traditional model school.

KEL, integral in district
Source Material: It is a public school fully accountable to the elected school board. It is confined by all conditions of the collective agreement and the School Act. It is no more 'private' than Montessori, French immersion, middle schools, storefront schools, community schools and all other alternate public schools in this district.

KEL, public school
Source Material: These parents strongly support the public education system and would prefer to place their children within the public system. This explains their demonstrated commitment to working with the trustees to create a learning environment supported by ample research as being able to optimize learning results for their children and others in the community.

In sum the argument in this section is that diversity within the public system has already been accepted in principle; these groups want it to be extended to include 'traditional schools', as another option.

Group B3: Parental Commitment

Within the second group of foundational elements ('parent commitment', 'parent input', 'parent partnership' and governance council), the first code has two components - advance commitment to the school and the resulting support for school policies.

SQ, parent commitment
Source Material: Criteria for Enrollment:
Each family would sign an agreement indicating its understanding and support for this traditional approach.

RICH, parent commitment
Source Material: A pre-enrollment information session between principal, parents, and students will take place to ensure the philosophy of the school is clearly understood. By consent of enrollment each parent and child agrees to the Alternative School program.

P/Q, parent commitment
Source Material: The consensus between home and school would result in firm home support of the school's clearly defined policies.

Group B4: Parent Input

The second code concerns ongoing involvement, as a right of parents:

> ABB, parent input
> Source Material: We urge all parents to be actively involved in and knowledgeable about their child's education.
>
> MR, parent input
> Source Material: We've recommended a parents' charter of rights and responsibilities that will spell out unmistakably the right of a parent to be welcomed in school, the kind of contact with and support from teachers that they're entitled to, and a line of communication between home and school that will be known to all concerned.

B5: Parent Partnership

The third code, universal in the proposals, concerns a basic operating style of the school that includes parent involvement:

> NV, parent partnership
> Source Material: The family of each student will commit to promoting and fostering the stated objectives, as parental involvement is seen as a vital ingredient to the school's success.
>
> RICH, parent partnership
> Source Material: With accurate knowledge of the level that a child is working at, parents are able to participate effectively in their children's education.
>
> SQ, parent partnership
> Source Material: regular homework, with the understanding that home and school would work together.
>
> WL, parent partnership
> Source Material: Create a team atmosphere, of home and school working together.

The argument in this section is that these groups want 'their' school to be unlike the public schools in that parents are part of the school, and are not outsiders.

B6: Governance Council

The next code, 'governance council', is certainly a part of the same general idea, as becomes obvious in the second passage below:

> KEL, governance council
> Source Material: Within the confines of the School Act, district policy and the collective agreement, the school council (parents and staff) would work as a collaborative leadership team to set school goals, identify needs, create school policy, and advise on all matters relating to school operation. This could include budget, programs, implementation,

organization, staffing, and evaluation.

NAN, governance council
Source Material: The council, including the principal, would then hire the teachers based on their adherence to the school philosophy and willingness to use direct instructional methods, regular testing, and ability to work with parents.

B7: Staff Selection Criteria

In keeping with this notion is a final code, 'staff selection criteria', although it does not quite meet the count of 30 established as the base level for major themes.

WL, staff selection criteria
Source Material: The Cariboo-Chilcotin School District would carry the responsibility of staffing the school with teachers who share and affirm the stated mission statement and to promote the 'traditional' teaching strategies expected by the school's parents.

Obviously if parents are to be asked to commit to the school's philosophy, so must teachers. (This code connects with another in the next section on instruction - 'consistency' of practices across the school.)

Group C: School-wide Features - Instructional

Themes of 'assessment', 'basic skills', 'direct instruction', 'homework policy', and 'traditional method of instruction' form a consistent grouping here. This group summarize the essence of these proposals.

C1: Assessment

Assessment is regular and multi-dimensional, reported to parents, referenced to individual growth and general standards, and serves as a form of student accountability.

CH, assessment
Source Material: The school will regularly assess student progress with standardized testing techniques reflected in letter grades, comments and parent/teacher conferences.

KEL, assessment
Source Material: consistent assessment of progress using recognized testing techniques: standardized testing, school wide testing, classroom testing, authentic evidence and teacher observation.

NV, assessment
Source Material: The learning progress of each individual will be monitored, both against his/her own previous accomplishments and against a grade benchmark

RICH, assessment
Source Material: A traditional school will not just provide "opportunity to learn" as the School Act mandates but will require the student to "demonstrate that he has learned."

C2: Basic Skills

The definition of basic skills in the proposals is broader than is typical, linked to mastery ideas and intended to serve later, more ambitious goals.

ABB, basic skills
Source Material: The school would have a consistent, structured approach emphasizing basic skill development and mastery of knowledge.

COUR, basic skills
Source Material: An emphasis, using well researched methods, on a broad base of skills which encompass: literacy (phonics, oral and written comprehension, reading, grammar, composition, and handwriting), cognitive development, problem solving, mathematics, computers, social sciences. fine arts, and physical education.

MR, basic skills
Source Material: "The mastery of these basic skills at the elementary school level are important not only for themselves but also because they form the indispensable basis for the achievement of almost all other goals of education

C3: Direct Instruction

As with basic skills, the notion here diverges noticeably from what is usually described as direct instruction. It is systematic, 'teacher-centred', varied by student, aimed at producing independent learners, and involves regular testing.

NAN, direct instruction
Source Material: incorporating direct instruction by the teacher that is structured, systematic, consistent, and sequential.

P/Q, direct instruction
Source Material: an emphasis on direct teacher-centered instruction while meeting the individual student's needs.

RICH, direct instruction
Source Material: This is not rote learning or memorization without meaning, it certainly is not lock-step teaching, it involves active learning at the appropriate skill level for each child. Teachers will use a whole range of grouping, activities, resources and delivery techniques.Students move on as quickly as possible after mastery to extension activities but the sequential learning structure will be the constant that gives students the capabilities they need to become independent learners and problem-solvers.

SQ, direct instruction
Source Material: time-tested methods using direct instruction and regular testing.

C4: Homework

Homework is (a) a linkage mechanism between home and school, (b) contributes to student commitment, and (c) to student responsibility.

BURN, homework policy
Source Material: Regular homework with the expectation that it will be done and with the understanding of home and school working together.

FSJ, homework policy
Source Material: strong sense of educational commitment and goals. This would be done through a regular homework program as well as high expectations.

KEL, homework policy
Source Material: Responsibility developed through regular homework policy.

C5: Traditional Method of Instruction

This code is one of the most numerous in the proposals. Closely connected to basic skills and direct instruction, it is a somewhat larger concept. It includes standards of achievement, sequence of skills and curriculum, teacher-directed instruction, instruction appropriate for basic skills, whole class instruction, additive, planned against timelines, but flexible enough to accommodate student differences.

BURN, traditional method of instruction
Source Material: a consistent, structured education, with clearly defined standards of academic achievement.

FSJ, traditional method of instruction
Source Material: teaching method that would be structured, sequential, and teacher directed.

NAN, traditional method of instruction
Source Material: The principal and teachers would be committed to teaching techniques which have been shown through research to be traditionally the best for teaching basic skills. The techniques emphasize direct teacher-centred whole class instruction.

NV, traditional method of instruction
Source Material: Students will advance through levels of knowledge, each one dependent upon the preceding level and tracked against a predetermined timeline.

RICH, traditional method of instruction
Source Material: structured in a manner which is systematic, consistent, and sequential yet flexible enough to meet the needs and abilities of individual students.

Group D: School-wide Features - Climate

The school climate elements of 'code of behaviour', and 'dress code' are universal, frequently mentioned and self-explanatory, and have an associated theme of student accountability.

FSJ, code of behaviour
Source Material: discipline and expectations for behavior, studies and homework would be consistently applicable for the entire school body.

MR, code of behaviour
Source Material: There will be an emphasis on discipline which supports the relationship between conduct, school atmosphere and high academic achievement. Discipline should be fair, consistent and understanding. Self-discipline will be the goal. A specific policy will be developed by parents, students and staff at the Maple Ridge Academic School.

COUR, student accountability
Source Material: Students will be held accountable for their conduct, scholastic effort and homework.

THE MINOR THEMES

I will describe the minor themes in values, foundational elements, and school-wide features through one or two citations which encompass the main shared ideas.

Values of Proposers

MR, accountable schools
Source Material: Schools need to be more accountable for their outcomes. The Ontario Royal Commission on Learning concludes, "the public school system is responsible to the public to demonstrate how well it is doing with our children".

MR, distrust of public schools
Source Material: A StatsCan 1989 survey of literacy skills showed 28% of 16-24 year-olds below an everyday reading level, and 44% fell short of numeracy requirements.

P/Q, distrust of public schools
Source Material: A recent survey of over 2,400 Nanaimo and area residents, conducted by ScanCanada, found 62% of respondents felt the present system wasn't doing a good job.

NV, distrust of public schools
Source Material: An ever-widening gulf has developed between educators and the public over the purpose and benefits of a public school education.

These proposals draw upon serious concerns about public education.

Foundational Elements

KEL, budget considerations
Source Material: Public school dollars belong to the entire community. The Traditional School will strengthen the public system by offering an alternate method of instruction. By attracting students whose learning needs are not now being met- students who may well be part of the growing drain to independent schools - the district budget is enriched.

NAN, budget considerations
Source Material: This council should establish a multi-level donor program to enable companies, community groups, and individuals to contribute to the school's success.

This argument turns the complaint against the funding of independent schools on its head. The return of students to the public sector is seen as a financial benefit to districts which are funded by the Ministry of Education on a per student basis. (Of course the Ministry might not agree. The return of students from the private sector to the public would be a financial disaster for an education budget already under strain.)

School-wide Features

KEL, high expectations
Source Material: Skilled teachers who set high expectations for students, since level of teacher expectations is a critical factor in student performance.

CH, report to parents
Source Material: Increased and more detailed feedback to parents regarding students' progress based on regular, accurate testing and assessment.

SURR, principal's role
Source Material: The principal will:
a) Create an orderly and pleasant school climate;
b) Demonstrate an ability to act as an instructional leader, achieve consensus with a teaching staff so that together they can achieve superior measured outcomes;
c) Be willing to strive for results, and have those results closely and publicly scrutinized.

COUR, school characteristics
Source Material: These would result in an orderly learning environment, safe atmosphere and school pride.

Together these minor codes introduce new and interesting elements which, in my judgement, would be acceptable to all the proposal writers. Some proposals were more complete than others in incorporating a larger range of connected ideas.

COMMENTARY ON THE THEMES

A summary of major and minor themes is given as Table 3. As part of *Appendix A*, the totals of numbers of codes (ideas in the proposals) are given in the final column. The total number of codes assigned is 1369; the number assigned to the group of major and minor themes is 1120. Thus the process has indeed identified the most important ideas within the proposals, as it was designed to do.

The major and minor codes together constitute a collective portrait of what a significant group of parents think is important about schools and schooling, and by extension what they find lacking in the public schools at present. In the summary portrait I have emphasized these themes.

VALUES OF PROPOSERS	FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT	SCHOOL-WIDE FEATURES	CLASSROOM FEATURES
		Instructional	**Instructional**
School Quality	budget considerations		
	*governance council	*assessment	
accountable sch	*integral in district	*basic skills	**Climate**
*beliefs of proposers	*parent commitment	*direct instruction	
*conditions for success	parent input	high expectations	
*goals	*parent partnership	*homework policy	
	*staff selec criteria	report to parents	
Choice Rationale	*use Ministry curric	st accountability	
*access		tchr centred instr.	
*alternate prog		*trad. method of instr	
*choice			
distrust of public sch		**Climate**	
*enrollment expectat		*code of behaviour	
		competition	
		*dress code	
		princ role	
*MAJOR THEME		safe & pleasant	

Table 3: Major & Minor Themes in the Proposals

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The proposals are based upon the beliefs of the proposers about the conditions necessary for success, and the appropriate goals for a school. Important amongst these is a consistent, structured approach to learning, and school accountability.

The rationale for proposing a new school is the extension of choice - another alternate program. The new school is necessary because of distrust of the existing public schools, which are seen as by some parents as ineffective. Given open access (first come, first served) many parents will choose to enroll their children in the alternate program.

The foundational elements in the new school, which is an integral part of the district, are to be adherence to the prescribed curriculum; parent input into decisions through a governance council and parent partnership in instruction; parent and teacher commitment to the values of the school ensured in advance of enrollment of students/hiring of staff, and school fund-raising to offset extra costs of school set-up.

Instructionally, the school will emphasize regular assessment and reporting to parents, and traditional models of instruction, especially direct instruction, which is teacher-centred (as opposed to child-centred), largely concerned with basic skills broadly defined. Teachers will have high expectations for students, and hold them accountable for achievement, including homework.

The climate in the school will emphasize a safe and pleasant environment, with a strict code of behaviour, a dress code, and a school ethos more competitive than cooperative. The main task of the principal is to develop and sustain this climate.

COMPARISONS to the SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS LITERATURE

In this section I proceed by analyzing current school effectiveness findings, and then drawing comparisons with the preceding analysis of the proposals. Given the size of the school effectiveness literature, its complexity, and a tendency for some of the findings to be inconsistent, I restrict commentary here to one American study (Chrispeels, 1992) and one British study (Sammons, Thomas, & Mortimore, 1997). Both these studies are recent, and have benefited immensely from earlier work, which they include in their summaries of important elements. This makes them useful synopses of a very large body of research.

Summary of Recent Studies

These studies differ in more than geography. The first uses primarily case study analysis (although staff surveys were also used) and examines eight more or less successful elementary schools in Southern California over a four-year span. The second uses statistical analysis, and looks carefully at student results over 5 years for a large cohort of about 7,000 secondary students in London and connects these data to school features (assessed by surveys and case studies over 3 years).

My bias with regard to school effectiveness research should be stated: I find school effectiveness studies which rely upon test scores as measures of school quality sadly defective and likely to arrive at misleading or limited findings. In my own work the outcome measure of importance is student commitment, expressed in positive perceptions of school climate, and a high rating of the school.

Sammons and colleagues note the difficulty but reject the notion of the 'good' school because 'we doubt whether agreement could . . . exist concerning the more amorphous concept of a good school'; they 'find it hard to believe that any acceptable definition of a good school could be proposed which did not include academic effectiveness - by which we mean the extent to which student progress is fostered - as an essential component' (1997, p. 8). They claim that both parents and policy-makers accept measures of pupil progress (ie improving test scores) as relating to 'the fundamental purpose of all schools'. Yet Townsend has shown that only 25% of parents regard pupil progress as the focal role of the school (Chrispeels, 1992, p. 167).

good school on entering the building and have little difficulty in agreeing on it when they see it; (b) the qualities of effective schools as stated by scholars almost always include elements, like administrative leadership, that could not possibly contribute to test scores directly - hence there must be more to the notion of effectiveness than is measured by tests; and (c) there are schools satisfying the definition of effectiveness given by the Sammons team to which they would not send their own children. I return to this later.

Parallels in the Major and Minor Themes

I have combined the strongest findings from these two very different studies, which are the best available, into what I would regard as broadly applicable general findings. Then the resulting summary is compared to the summary of the proposals. The results of this process are contained in Chart A.

In the chart I chose to begin with the Chrispeels summary, since it was more inclusive, and based upon elementary school studies. Hence it is likely to be of more relevance to the British Columbian proposals, which are for elementary schools (at least in the initial phase). Both books have rather complex summarizing chapters - I have chosen to select elements from the discussion rather than focus upon charted summaries. The comparisons are complicated by slightly different organizational patterns and terminology. I have used Communitarian **(CO)** and Academic Press **(AP)** as identifiers for alternative theories about effective schools, to be discussed below. Judgements about the themes in the proposals which require explanation are asterisked in the chart.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL QUALITY

Chrispeels:	Sammons et al.:	IN PROPOSALS?
SCHOOL CLIMATE	SCHOOL CULTURE	
(CO) safe, orderly	safe, orderly environment;	MINOR THEME
(AP) high expectations	NO	MINOR THEME
(CO) shared mission	shared vision/goals;	MAJOR THEME*
(CO) recognition/rewards	student-focussed - students feel valued	NO
(CO) tchr. collegiality	NO	NO
(CO) home / school relations	parent support / involvement	MAJOR THEME
INSTRUCTION		
(AP) curriculum alignment	consistency in approach	MAJOR THEME*
(AP) academic focus	academic emphasis	MAJOR THEME*
(AP) frequent monitoring	NO	MAJOR THEME
(CO) staff development	NO	NO
STRUCTURES		
(CO) collaborative structures	NO	NO
(CO) opportunities to decide	NO	NO
LEADERSHIP		
(CO) shared leadership	collective leadership	MINOR THEME*
(CO) shared vision	shared vision / goals	MAJOR THEME*
(CO) commitment to change	NO	NO
(CO) shared learning	NO	NO

CHART A: Comparing Effective Schools Summary to Proposals

CO =Communitarian theory AP = Academic Press theory

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There are six asterisked claims requiring comment. First, with respect to 'shared vision/goals', I have taken the major theme of 'goals' in the proposals together with the themes of 'parent commitment' and 'staff selection criteria' to represent this element. In an existing school, one tries to develop shared vision. In setting up a new school, one tries to select members who share a stated vision. By ensuring that prospective parents buy in to the school's goals, and that staff are hired who accept the goals, the proposers are attempting to ensure shared vision and goals.

With respect to 'curriculum alignment', I have taken the emphasis upon using Ministry curriculum, and the many references to sequencing in the proposals, to be an expression of the need for curriculum alignment - consistency and sequencing in what is taught and tested.

For 'academic emphasis', I have taken the themes of assessment, student accountability, homework, and high expectations to represent this dimension.

'Collaborative structures' in the Chrispeels and the Sammons work is always teacher collaboration; the equivalent element in the proposals is 'parent partnership'. My reading is that they would welcome the kind of teacher collaboration Chrispeels identifies, as long as it did not exclude parents from participation in decisions or activities.

Shared' or 'Collective' leadership in the Chrispeels and the Sammons work is always educator leadership. I claim that 'parent input' and the 'governance council', a major theme amongst the Foundational Elements, is the equivalent in the proposals. This is rather extreme, yet there is little doubt that the proposers see this council, which in most proposals combines teachers, parents, and the principal, as associated with the notion of parent partnership and parent input, and also with ensuring consistency of goals across the school. It is the proposers' version of collective leadership. 'Shared vision' has already been discussed.

In sum the proposals match up reasonably well with the two effective schools studies. There are 16 elements in the Chrispeels portrait (12 CO; 4 AP). There are eight matches with the Sammons version (6 CO; 2 AP), and 10 (7 CO; 3 AP) with the proposals, when one takes into account the differences between looking at an existing school, and planning for a school. I conclude that the proposers have learned well from the effective schools research, even though there are insufficient references to it for that element to be coded as a major or minor theme. (Five of the 14 proposals refer to the research directly; see *Appendix A.*)

But the areas in which there are no matches between the proposals and the effective schools elements are rather consistent: They are 'traditional methods of instruction' and associated codes found in the proposals, and 'student-focused', 'staff development' and 'shared learning', found in the research.

The common element in the second area is collaboration - the sense that teachers, parents, administrators and students are working together. These elements have been labeled 'communitarian'. The Chrispeels account is very heavily weighted towards this approach - perhaps because it is a study of elementary schools.

Such an approach is either explicitly rejected in the proposals, or is a minority view only. For example, there is much discussion of teacher-centred instruction; but child-centred instruction (which I take to include cooperative learning strategies) is mentioned only as what is rejected by the proposers:

> NV, child-centred practices
> Source Material: Increasingly, these new strategies have worried many parents and provoked others into frank opposition. The mounting criticism and pressure results in demoralization, often felt most intensely by the classroom teachers.

Similarly, competition between students occurs as a major theme; cooperation is only mentioned twice in the whole set of proposals. Student accountability is a minor theme; student behavior, with an emphasis on rules, is a major theme. But student support, participation, or rights are rarely mentioned.

With respect to the first area, the group of themes in the proposals which are coded as "basic skills', 'direct instruction', 'teacher-centred instruction' and 'traditional methods of instruction', I believe some of this strong element reflects a concern for an academic emphasis, but there is undoubtedly an element here which goes beyond the effective schools literature. Direct instruction is:

> a form of elementary school teaching that promotes on-task classroom behaviour, and through it, increased academic achievement...an effort by the teacher to monitor and control student classroom attention and persistence (to take over the process of behavior control), rather than permit or encourage students to control their own behaviour. (Corno & Snow, 1986, p.622).

Others have defined it as "characterized by frequency of single-answer questions and drill, large group instruction, and opportunities for controlled practice." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992, p.65) and is typically found to be associated with success in teaching basic skills. Most scholars believe that more open methods are associated with complex cognitive learning, problem-solving and creativity, ideas coded in the proposals as 'beyond basic'.

It is this group of themes which give the proposals their label of 'traditional'. They certainly fit within the academic press theory of school effectiveness, rather than the communitarian theory and strengthen the focus on academic press a good deal. To understand the significance of the consistent difference between the proposals and the effective schools research arising out of the strength of focus on academic press, I return to a critique of the research itself, and connect this with the values in the proposals.

The Effective Schools Research and Values in the Proposals

The qualities of effective schools identified by careful studies like the two used here almost always include elements, such as administrative leadership or teacher collegiality, that could not possibly contribute to test scores directly. Many have noted that a

major weakness of effective schools research is the failure to connect test scores directly to classroom activities. Sammons and colleagues deal with this difficulty by arguing that:

> 'higher-level conditions, aspects concerning school leadership, policy and organization for example, in some way facilitate conditions at lower levels (the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms). These in turn have a direct impact on student academic outcomes (1997,p. 166).

Only one school effectiveness study has looked carefully at the connection between school structure and characteristics and classroom activities, a lengthy study conducted in Louisiana (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). One consistent classroom-level difference between more and less effective schools has emerged: "teachers in an effective school displayed almost double the mean percent of interactive teaching as that displayed by teachers at an ineffective school" (Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1989, p. 3). Interactive teaching here is understood as teacher-directed but requiring student contribution; it is certainly closer to 'direct-instruction' than to cooperative learning as typically practiced, in which the teacher is rarely directly involved with students.

Most scholars have accepted a 'communitarian' theory about school climate as the best explanation of the connection between test scores and school features. Others argue that 'academic press' is a better explanation:

> Many researchers and reformers currently claim that school effectiveness hinges on 'communal organization'. They contend that shared values and activities, positive adult social relations, positive teacher-student relations, and democratic governance enhance students' school engagement and their academic achievement. Yet a competing theory - that of academic press - posits a more direct link between school processes and academic outcomes. This theory suggests that schools are effective when they offer demanding curricula and employ teachers whose educational expectations for their students are high. (Phillips, 1997, p. 633)

There is little doubt that both elements are important. All of the elements identified by Chrispeels and Sammons and summarized in Chart A above can be assigned to one or the other category. We have long known from careful empirical studies that change in schools requires both 'pressure' and 'support' (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Leadership studies over many years have also identified two elements in the relationships between leaders and followers which characterize successful leaders. These are labelled 'initiating structure' and 'consideration' and are recognizably the same elements.

> Blase (1987) applies this polarity to relationships between teachers and principals and finds that more successful principals balance the two elements. He describes task-relevant competencies (initiating structure) that focus on planning, defining, organizing, and evaluating work. Within this domain, the effective leader demonstrates strength in the following areas: accessibility, consistency, knowledge-expertise, decisiveness, goals and directions, follow through, ability to manage time, and problem-solving. Consideration-related factors, on the other hand, focus on meeting the social and emotional needs of others.

My own research (Coleman, in press) has suggested the importance of a general climate of collaboration - particularly teacher/parent and teacher/student:

> Chapter 6: More collaborative teachers (as judged by parents and students) create a classroom setting that reflects many of the characteristics of the effective school (Chrispeels, 1992, pp. 9, 10). They convey to students and parents that in their classrooms students work hard and "learn lots" (opportunity to learn). Students are kept informed of what is expected of them (high expectations) and how well they have achieved those goals (frequent monitoring of student progress). The collaborative teacher extends learning opportunities by keeping parents informed about how parents can support learning at home (student time on task; positive home-school relations). Collaborative teachers believe that when parents are brought into the relationship, it makes education "easier... for the kid, the parent, and the teacher." Other teachers convey professional distance, usually wordlessly; as one parent observed: "he figures he can handle it himself better."

Sammons and colleagues (1997, pp. 165-167) point out a variety of ways in which school and classroom levels interact:

> Behavior policy and practice, leading to a safe orderly working environment and an academic emphasis, are necessary for task achievement (effective teaching and learning and thus students' academic progress) while the student-focused environment concerns social cohesion and creates a positive climate for learning. The school experience thus becomes both demanding and enjoyable for teachers and students alike. (1997, p. 179)

Their model of secondary school effectiveness (1997, p. 170) emphasizes interactions between levels. They argue that there are many ways for schools to be ineffective, but one mode of effective school (p. 178), and it is tightly linked. Others have also pointed out the importance of linkages:

> The most powerful and enduring lesson from all the research on effective schools is that the better schools are more tightly linked - structurally, symbolically, and culturally - than the less effective ones. They operate more as an organic whole and less as a loose collection of disparate subsystems. (Murphy, 1990, p. 9)

The values in the proposals, as the chart makes clear, are strongly aligned with the 'academic press' theory of school effectiveness, and in many cases reject the 'communitarian' theory. For example, with respect to 'student-centred' schools or classrooms, all the comments are negative. One is particularly enlightening as to the reasons - an emphasis on the communitarian side prevents or works against an emphasis on academic press:

> NV, child centred practices,
> Source Material: Critics contend that because child-centred education does not impose clear standards, it has become unaccountable and is producing near illiterates.

What the proposers are rejecting, in my judgement, is support without pressure. Certainly such schools exist: In the U.S. a middle school study found a very strong negative correlation between 'teachers caring for students' and the 'average amount of homework assigned' (Phillips, 1997) . Yet Sammons and colleagues argue that:

> A student-focused approach is indicative of a positive affective environment, an emphasis on the quality of staff-student relationships and enjoyment in the process of learning. It is related to higher levels of student motivation. Our results demonstrate that a student-focused approach is important for academic outcomes. (1997, p. 174)

The students in my own research are quite clear in their preferences: they want both challenge (or pressure), and help (or support):

> "He's nice, and he helps me"; "the teacher is real nice and she teaches, she doesn't play around and play games, she teaches" (Coleman, in press)

One of the 'proximal' variables identified in an enormous review of all of the research world-wide on the correlates of school achievement (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993) is the relationship between teacher and student. Both academic interactions and teacher and student social interactions are important (p. 277). Collaborative teachers in our study focus on and maintain a balance between both aspects of the teacher-student relationship. They do so with positive effect upon students' and parents' attitudes.

In essence then I do not see 'communitarian' and 'academic press' theories of school effectiveness as competing explanations, but rather as complementary. What is needed for schools to be truly effective is both 'pressure' and 'support'. The proposals are much clearer about the need for pressure than they are about the need for support. By comparison to the Chrispeels study, they underweight the importance of the 'communitarian' element.

The element coded as 'public concerns re public schools' (see *Appendix A*), although not a frequent theme, helps to explain this feature of the proposals:

> NAN, concerns re public school
> Source Material: June 1994 Scan Canada found that 62% of 2440 Nanaimo residents felt that the present system was not doing a good job. Over 50% of those said that they had considered taking their children out of the public system for alternative education.
>
> P/Q, concerns re public school
> Source Material: Recent studies have also shown that academic outcomes are slipping. We do not measure up internationally and parents nationally are widely and openly debating the effectiveness of our public school system.

The proposers seem to feel that the public schools have got the balance between pressure and support wrong and the model schools being proposed are intended to correct the balance. In the final section I will return to this issue.

THE PROPOSALS and SCHOOL CHOICE

In this commentary, I will connect the proposals to the school choice literature.

The Politics of Choice

The analysis of the proposals makes it clear that there are strong political elements involved. Focusing on the major themes suggests three, stated in apparent order of importance to proposers. The first concerns relationships between school and parents - 'parent partnership' (coded as occurring 59 times in the proposals). Second, proposers associate the act of choosing with commitment to the chosen institution; 'parent commitment' is coded 50 times. The third element involves governance - a council with broad representation is coded 40 times. I will comment on these three choice elements, connecting them up to the literature.

Parent Partnership: There is little doubt that parent involvement is associated with school effectiveness. Wang and colleagues concluded that proximal factors such as family influence (and the student characteristics closely related to them) are one of the few strong and reliable influences upon student commitment and achievement (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993).

The proposers clearly see the parent partnership as both a direct instructional partnership, and a role in support of the school:

> COUR, parent partnership
> Source Material: With accurate knowledge of the level that a child is working at, parents are able to participate effectively in their children's education.
>
> KEL, parent partnership
> Source Material: Parents will have obligations to support learners. As parent partnerships are essential to students success, staff will expect a high degree of parental involvement in the life of the school.
>
> NV, parent partnership
> Source Material: The family of each student will commit to promoting and fostering the stated objectives, as parental involvement is seen as a vital ingredient to the school's success.

The strength of the connection in the proposals between parent support and school quality is obvious. There are both local and scholarly explanations.

First, there are public schools in British Columbia in which signs are posted at the entrance to advise parents that they cannot bring their primary school children into the school - they must leave them at the door. There are also schools in which teachers have barred individual parents from the school, because they are "troublemakers" (that is, concerned about the welfare of their children, and not convinced that the school is serving them well). These schools are unusual, at the moment, but represent a teacher ethos which sees parents as the enemy in a public school system.

The body of knowledge associated with a profession is sometimes used to distance members of that profession from those they serve. In my own research I have seen many parent comments on this distancing, about which they feel strongly. Sykes (1990) argues that teachers:

> must share responsibility with parents, and this means reducing social distance and demystifying school knowledge. In other fields, social distance and mystification enhance the claim to expertise, and possession of the knowledge contributes to social distance. This circular relation builds professional status but is impermissible in teaching (p. 81).

But distancing of parents seems characteristic of educational systems everywhere. The universal perception of 'distancing' is matched by as universal a desire for a more productive relationship between home and school. Both are illustrated in these statements, drawn from Macbeth & Ravn (1994):

> The school structures in Austria, Germany and Switzerland enable teachers to be able to keep parents at arms length. It is these structures that cause parents to bemoan, just as they did 150 years ago, "What can I do: I've got a hostage at school." What ought to be the most important proper expectations? A school constitution forcing teachers to do what is expected of them...to try everything possible to enable the children in their care to learn to the best of their possibilities both inside and outside of school. (Krumm, 1994, p. 23)

> There is an increasing opposition in Italy to what might be described as the 'fictitious pedagogy' of the 1970s which viewed schooling as the totality of education. . . . Its results were:
> * the diffusion of prejudicial suspicion about the educational capacities of parents and, when schools failed to live up to expectations, of teachers as well;
> * impotent feelings among relevant adults and a mistrust of their own capacities and resources;
> * impatience and resentment by parents and teachers at the scapegoat role allocated them;
> * loss of prestige of both family and school.

> If construction of identity begins in the family and if the family mediates between the individual and society, then the family needs constant reinforcement from social agencies, including the school. It also requires the continuous example of those adults who are significant to the child. These, again, point to partnership between school and family. (Scaparro, 1994, p. 31)

> Teachers often wish to do their job independently; they find it difficult to have parents watching over their shoulders. On the other hand, parents want the school to reinforce what they themselves

"

> transfer to their children at home . . . . "The school to the parents" is a maxim that is practically never realized. The formal school system should leave more room for parents to substantiate their responsibilities for their children. It would only be to the advantage of teachers and students alike. (Smit & van Esch, 1994, p. 66; speaking of the Netherlands)

> Too little effort, in my opinion, is made to develop joint learning processes involving parents, teachers and children on equal terms, while admitting their different qualifications, capacities and institutional roles to be developed and applied. Mutual influence and dependency offers opportunities for using the manifold resources in creating a common ground on which to develop new joint learning processes. (Ravn, 1994, p. 77; speaking of the Scandinavian countries)

> The aspect of parental involvement which is more significant *educationally* (italics in original) concerns parents' contributions to the learning of their own individual child. If significant learning happens inevitably in the family and significant learning (of a different nature and differently provided) also happens in the school, then it may be argued that educational partnership should involve both elements of learning. . . . Once home-learning is seen to be an inevitable and remorseless element of every child's education and influential upon teachers' effectiveness, then a powerful *professional* (italics in original) reason for educational partnership emerges. The challenge is to find ways to harness home-learning without disrupting the established systems or putting undue pressure on parents. (Macbeth, 1994, p. 84, 85)

In Canada parents are widely supportive of schools and teachers (Livingstone, 1995; Barlow & Robertson, 1994). Yet many parents are conscious that much more could be done to help their students learn, in classrooms and in the home, if their own willingness to help was not discounted and undervalued. As one proposal put it:

> ABB, parent partnership
> Source Material: Students, staff, and parents working together will form a strong team able to provide the best educational experience for every child

A very large body of research supports this central contention of the proposals.

Parent Commitment: The explicit comments coded here describe a process whereby parents are asked to commit themselves to school policies in advance, to ensure their support. Such support is of inestimable value to teachers. Teachers' work lives are shaped by their students:

> Students can confirm or destroy teachers' pride of craft . . students have ultimate control over the fruit of teachers' labors. Teachers cannot obtain the satisfaction of a job well done through their own efforts alone; they can obtain them only through the cooperation of their students (Metz, 1993, pp. 104, 105).

Hence teachers are extremely dependent upon their students. They need to feel efficacious, based upon student learning; they need to feel pride of craft, based upon student cooperation. The advantage enjoyed by some private schools lies in the selectivity that they can exercise with respect to students. This is not so much because they can

refuse students, but because the students who have chosen to be there are more committed to the school. "The fact that the school is chosen alters the relationship among chooser and chosen" (Raywid, 1990, p. 169). This notion is picked up in the proposals:

> BURN, parent partnership
> Source Material: when parents actively select a school for its approach to learning that school and children have increased opportunities for excellence.
>
> FSJ, parent partnership
> Source Material: here between home and school. When parents actively and freely select a school for its approach to learning, the school and those children have increased opportunity for excellence.

Some teachers in the public schools believe that many parents (and their children) do not care about school and schooling. This is often heard in school staffrooms as "you can't expect those kids to be interested in school - look at their homes and/or parents". Another form of the statement is "this school serves a disadvantaged community". *Although these statements seem different, the educational consequences are the same - low expectations for student achievement, and no expectations for parent involvement.*

One of the strongest conclusions from my own work is that *all parents care*. The most universal comment in our interviews concerned the importance of education: virtually every student we interviewed said that schooling was important to their future lives. The vast majority who said this also noted parent concern and guidance on the issue.

Because all parents care, *all students care*. In the UK, "behind the public mask of nonchalance that some pupils wear to hide their anxiety about the future is a concern to succeed and some realization of the consequences of not making the grade" (Rudduck, Chaplain, & Wallace, 1996, p. 3). Of the hundreds of students we interviewed, a few children asserted that they did not care about school. But children in middle schools wear their hearts on their sleeves: they were clearly saying that *school did not care about them.* Usually this was in the context of a particular classroom, or of interactions with a particular teacher.

Recent work by Mayer in the U.S. has shown that money (beyond the bare minimum) cannot buy improved life chances for children: "Once basic material needs are met, factors other than income become increasingly important to how children fare." (1997, p. 148) The relationship between parenting practices and parent income is weak (p. 11). Yet parental effects upon children's learning are strong. Mayer quotes a teacher working in a school serving a poor community:

> One of the most astounding things to me since I've been here is how few parents there are - in fact I could only think of one or two if I thought real hard - that don't seem to care. Folks care. They want for their kids." (1997, p. 151)

It is very sad that this insight of the teacher is seen as "astounding". Parents of all income levels do 'want for their kids'. Parent commitment to their children's educational advancement is indisputable, in my view, and probably the strongest motivation for these proposals for schools of choice.

The connection between parent actions and student commitment are strong in my own work in B.C. It is a wide-spread phenomenon. In the U.S., Clark (1983) has provided excellent descriptions of how poor Black parents can make a difference. Some of the families have high-achieving children, some have low-achieving children. Clark examined the family dynamics which differentiate them:

> Specific psychosocial orientations and home activity patterns were seen clearly time and again in the high achievers' homes. These recurring processes and patterns, as a group, represent parent' styles of helping their children adjust to the student role by "sponsoring" or grooming them for that role. The interpersonal communication patterns in these homes tended to be marked by frequent child-parent dialogue, strong parental encouragement in academic pursuits, clear and consistent limits set for the young, warm and nurturing interactions, and consistent monitoring of how they used their time. (1983, p. 111)

In the UK the importance of parent attitudes was demonstrated long ago - an investigation for the Plowden Committee (1967) "showed conclusively that it was not material home circumstances but parental attitudes which accounted for the greatest amount of variance in pupil achievement" (Solomon, 1994, p. 565). Within the general attitude set, it was parental aspirations for their children which made the greatest difference to achievement.

It is not who parents are that is important, but what they do, with and for their children, to prepare them for success in school. Parent commitment to a particular school, demonstrated by choosing, virtually guarantees student commitment. This will undoubtedly make the lives of teachers very much less frustrating, since they will have support from parents in dealing with student behaviour. It also will go a long way towards guaranteeing school success.

The Governance Council: The proposers are almost unanimous in referring to a 'governance council'; some describe the functions in detail:

> CH, governance council
> Source Material: The school will operate with a joint parent teacher council to strengthen the relationship between home and school.

> KEL, governance council
> Source Material: Within the confines of the School Act, district policy and the Collective Agreement, the school council (parents and staff) would work as a collaborative leadership team to set school goals, identify needs, create school policy, and advise on all matters relating to school operation. This could include budget, programs, organization, staffing, and evaluation.

MR, governance council

Source Material: [the school will] operate with a Board of Governors and council consisting of the principal, teachers, and parents of enrolled children.

NAN, governance council

Source Material: The council, including the principal would then hire the teachers based on their adherence to the school philosophy and willingness to use direct instructional methods, regular testing, and ability to work with parents.

The governance council is a major theme in the proposals. The proposers are in tune with some scholars, who believe that the only way to change schools is to bring parents into positions of control. Raywid (1990) proposes "schools of choice" as the only way to open schooling to parental influence. Sarason (1995) believes that the existing governance system should be abolished. He describes a series of meetings with teachers, in which teachers complained about parents:

> It would be unfair to say that these teachers were, so to speak, antiparents (i.e., wishing that they would go away and stay away). What was nettlesome to them was when parents, directly or indirectly, challenged their professional knowledge and practices, and sometimes the scope of their authority. That response is not peculiar to educators; it is a response quite characteristic of those in all the professions. (1995, p. 23)

To combat this professional prejudice, Sarason proposes a political principle for the governance of schools: "the decision-making process should reflect the views of all those who will be affected by the ultimate decision". (1995, p. 39)

Some of the political steps towards this are becoming obvious, in Canada at least. In Ontario, a *Globe and Mail* columnist describes "the iron triangle of educational theorists, teachers' unions, and Ministry of Education bureaucrats", and notes that "it took a grassroots revolt by parents, business and citizens to press the government to break that triangle".

Some Canadian scholars have described the problem. Lawton (1995) recommends a wholesale commitment to charter schools. He argues for the principles that "parents must be able to ensure that their children are educated in accordance with their family's values", that "no group should be given a monopoly within the education system" and that "parents and school-community members must control the governance of individual elementary and lower-secondary schools". (p. 98-100)

Such views typically emerge from parent frustration. This frustration is common in the U. S. (Raywid, 1990) and in the UK (Hughes, Wikeley, & Nash, 1994; Woods, 1988), as well as in Canada. It lead to major change in New Zealand.

However, there is little documented evidence to this point of parents successfully governing schools. The Chicago experiment with universal school-based management by parents (Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1994) has encountered serious management problems (Hess, 1995).

In the UK, parent governors rely heavily upon educational professionals, notably Heads, in much the same way as school Boards in North America were seen to be dominated by Superintendents (Boyd, 1976). Filling parent-governor positions is sometimes difficult for schools (Macbeth, 1989, p. 143). Furthermore, few parent representatives on Boards of Governors of schools in the U.K. are lay people - the governor position tends to be occupied by educational professionals from other schools or colleges who bring the values of the profession to the job.

For New Zealand, a thorough account of a major shift in governance to the local level, described as 'school-based management', has been provided by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, which has followed the progress of the reform via five national surveys of a stratified random sample of schools, seeking responses from principals, teachers, trustees and parents (Wylie, 1997). The reports on the reform have focused on a) the effects on the central work of schools (curriculum and instruction, resources); b) the effectiveness of the reforms with respect to parent involvement and learning opportunities for children; and c) school effectiveness.

School-based management was part of a major set of school reforms adopted in 1989. The major reforms included 1. a school charter, setting out each school's goals and program; 2. a per pupil finding formula; 3. free choice of school for all parents; 4. regular reviews of school performance conducted by a central body, and published; and 5. boards of trustees for each school, elected by parents and including the principal and a staff representative.

The report summarizes previous reports, and finds that, as the reform has settled in, several major trends have become obvious: First, the governance shift has engendered much more partnership between parents and professionals; second, teacher workloads are reported as very high, and affecting morale; third, teachers and administrators now are seeing better teaching and learning in their classrooms, although this is linked more to curriculum reform than to changes in governance; fourth, the improved reporting by teachers to the Boards of Trustees has had some impact upon teaching and learning. However, the report also suggests that differences in achievement levels and equity of opportunity between schools have been unaffected, and school fundraising is increasingly necessary.

The final report finds that there have been major changes in student assessment, monitoring of school programs, staff development, and reporting to parents. Parent satisfaction is high (82%), with about 66% finding that their access to information on their child's progress and classroom program was good. About 85% of parents were able to enroll their children in their first choice of school.

Summarizing the whole experience, the final report concludes that school-based management works; "Schools can make allocative decisions, including staff appointments. Professionals and parents can usually work together through the framework of the board of trustees to make decisions for and about their school. The core work of schools has continued, in most schools, with little disruption" (1997, p. 175).

But what makes it work is the willingness of educators and parents to take on high workloads, and to raise money locally. "The ethos of partnership . . . has been an important lubricant for school self-management" (1997, p. 175). The most obvious failure has been in accountability - that the boards of trustees would hold principals accountable for school results. Accountability continues to be important, but it is professional accountability rather than reporting to a lay board, or a sense of market forces at work on the school.

The New Zealand experience suggests that major changes in governance are likely to be expensive; they are likely to result in high levels of parent satisfaction. No studies have directly related parent governance to school effectiveness.

British parents are primarily focused upon the quality of relationships in the school, and the general climate, rather than on control issues. (Hughes, Wikeley, & Nash, 1994, pp. 99-104) When choosing schools they are very unlikely to examine school governance. The best-selling *Good Schools Guide* (Atha & Drummond, 1991) lists 40 questions for parents to ask when shopping for a school; there is no reference to governance. In recent League Tables of secondary school examination results published in the UK, many of the highest-performing schools are in the State sector (public schools in the Canadian sense), suggesting that governance is not an issue.

A personal account of choosing a school which appeared recently in a popular middle-class UK newspaper may be representative. Describing weeks of indecision, it concludes:

> Another parent said that the three most important things were the head teacher, the head teacher, and the head teacher. Yes, but in a bigger school the head may be an administrator with little contact with the children.We tried to think of one thing to tip the balance - to make the decision simple and end the agony. I can't be sure that we made the right decision or in the right way. But in the end it came down to this. There had been one school where the children were noticeably cheerful and motivated, which made me wish I myself could go there. So we are sending Beatrice to Glendower. (Bartholomew, 1997)

Nothing in our B.C. data suggests that average parents here are any more interested in school governance than British parents. Parent Advisory Committees are viewed very negatively. School Boards are never mentioned in hundreds of lengthy and very wide-ranging interviews. Even Principals are rarely mentioned (quite the reverse of my experience in conducting school climate research 15 years ago). Our parents describe the source of both positive and negative schooling experiences for children as the classroom, not the school. There is little sense that changes at school level would change the teacher/student and teacher/parent relationships which parents see as vital.

Our study sites included one private school, which was fully parent-controlled, financially and managerially, charging high fees and enrolling students from families with considerable financial and professional resources. Parents were required to devote some time to volunteering in the school. Yet we were unable to see any consequences of this governance model (rather close to that in the proposals) for the classroom experi-

ences of students and parents. These parents seemed just as frustrated with their experiences in trying to help their children as the public school parents we interviewed.

Parents in my research generally dismiss parent governance (at least as they have seen it operate in Parent Advisory Councils - although these councils do not have any decision making power) as either necessary or useful, because they see little connection at present between governance arrangements and teaching and learning activities. Some scholars agree with them. Discussing the current international education reform movement, Levin argues:

> the kinds of strategies that might really change the educational basis of schooling - in particular placing students and their schooling at the centre of the educational process - have not been at the centre of government-sponsored reforms. Partly this may be because they are so difficult to put into practice. We know how to pass laws changing governance but we don't know much yet about how to change instructional practices. Partly it may be because such changes are less visible than testing and governance changes, and so lack immediate political appeal. Whatever the reason, **it is hard to believe that programs of reform will lead to better outcomes, in any sense, if they do not centre around what students do**. (1997, p. 264; my emphases)

I agree. But if the governance changes were linked to teaching and learning through much more intensive involvement of parents in these activities, my own research suggests that the sense of partnership that emerges from school-based management could be very important to improving schools. Given that part of the emphasis on parent partnerships in the proposals is on precisely that linkage with instruction, this is a positive element.

In general then, the elements in the proposals which exemplify the 'politics of choice', parent partnership, parent commitment, and the governance council, are likely to be very positive contributors to the success of the proposed schools.

The Choice Proposals: Striking a Balance

Here I will try to assess the proposals as 'alternative schools' -responding to the question *'What would these schools add to the range of alternatives available to parents, and why would parents choose such schools?'*

In comparing the proposals to the effective schools literature, it became clear that the traditional schools modeled in the proposals are much more in tune with the 'academic press' theory of school effectiveness than with the 'communitarian theory'. Indeed, many of the elements in the traditional school model represent a reaction against features of the communitarian model of effective school.

However, a careful interpretation of the coded material suggests that many of the elements in the proposals match up rather well with two recent models of effective schools which were based upon very careful longitudinal studies.

I would like to try to strike a balance - identify those features of the model that emerges from the proposals that are likely to be extremely productive. These I order from strongest to weakest. I will comment on those elements in the model, and more impor-

tantly those features of a good school that are ignored in the model, that are in my opinion likely to deter some parents from choosing these particular schools. I will deal with groups of themes organized into 7 topics:

TOPIC 1: Parent Partnership & Governance Council

This is the strongest element in the proposal, when the emphasis is upon partnership in instruction. Despite the evidence from New Zealand, I find it hard to accept that parent governance is vital to this element.

TOPIC 2: Parent Commitment, and Staff Selection Criteria

These two elements fit together. The notion of a school-wide emphasis upon academic work requires both the commitment of parents, gained at the time of enrollment, and of teachers, gained upon hiring into the school. (Although the latter element faces many practical difficulties: teacher contracts are extremely restrictive - principals and schools do not now 'choose' teachers; schools are chosen by teachers.)

The commentary in the Fort St. John proposal is pertinent and sensible:

> FSJ, teacher autonomy,
> There are many differing methods of instruction, and teachers have differing styles and philosophies. A traditional model school attempts to bring together teachers whose strengths and preferences lie in this traditional and structured method of instruction. When teachers apply for positions in this school, they will be placed according to interest, qualifications and suitability, just as in Montessori or French immersion school staffing.

TOPIC 3: Alternate Program, Choice, Access, Enrollment Expectations

The notion of the traditional school as yet another alternative offering within a broad range already available seems very *sensible*. Access defined as 'first come, first served', as it has been for Immersion schools seems eminently fair, and certainly likely to support the parent commitment element in Topic 2.

TOPIC 4: Beliefs, Conditions for Success, Goals

Conditions for success and associated codes constitutes the academic press element in the proposals. Some scholars would support this element as vital to better schools. The Burnaby statement is excellent:

> BURN, conditions for success
> Source Material: We believe that children will become good citizens and lifelong learners, that they will be able to achieve their ambitions and compete in world markets, if they are given a consistent, structured education, with clearly defined standards of academic achievement.

TOPIC 5: Integral in District, Use Ministry Curriculum

These are a practical necessity. The devolution model in the UK, in which schools became independent of the Local Authority, while receiving public funds directly

through the Ministry, has been successful for some schools. But these schools follow the National Curriculum carefully, and have often contracted with the LEA for services which they cannot easily fund themselves. Important amongst these is teacher development activities and opportunities.

Parents would (or should) be wary of schools which lack a strong teacher development process in place. I argued the case for this in my own work on choosing a school, (Coleman,1994):

> More effective schools almost always report higher levels of teacher sharing - observing in each others' classrooms, teaching demonstration lessons, engaging in "technical talk" about various practices. "Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching." (Little, 1982, p. 331); sharing produces teacher learning (Rosenholtz, 1989).
>
> The most important features of the department and school setting which support teacher development are summed up in the notion of the professional community: Effective responses to the challenges of contemporary classrooms require a spirited, reflective professional community of teachers - a work-place setting that allows examination of assumptions about practice, focuses collective expertise on solutions based on classroom realities, and supports efforts to change and grow professionally. . . . Strong professional communities of this stripe are essential - especially for veteran teachers - to changing norms of practice and pedagogy in ways that benefit both students and teachers.(McLaughlin, in Little & McLaughlin, 1993, p. 98).

TOPIC 6: Traditional Methods of Instruction

The emphasis upon 'traditional methods of instruction' in the proposals differentiates the schools proposed from most of the models found in the effective schools literature. However, it is in keeping with the Academic Press dimension, and is functional for teaching basic skills, as claimed. The emphasis is not universal: four of the proposals recognize the importance of varied strategies, and it is doubtful that any of the proposals really intend instructional methods to be totally consistent. The Kelowna proposal is probably representative of the more general beliefs amongst the proposers:

> KEL, teaching strategies varied
>
> Source Material: There will be a variety of strategies employed including group work, individual work and whole class instruction depending on the goals and resources available for the particular lesson. This is an important aspect of professionalism which will be encouraged at the traditional model school.

Such varied strategies are vitally important for dealing with the broad range of curriculum issues covered in the Ministry-mandated curriculum accepted by the proposers.

TOPIC 7: Code of Behaviour, Dress Code

The emphasis upon a code of behaviour and a dress code is strong. It is not balanced with an emphasis upon student support, what Chrispeels describes as 'recognition/rewards' and Sammons as a 'student-focused' approach. The research, including my own, is very clear on the importance of such support, via personalized connections

between teachers and students. I have argued that student-teacher collaboration is an element matching student-parent collaboration in importance in generating student commitment to schooling.

Indeed, Wehlage and colleagues (1989) entitle their book on schools which succeed with disadvantaged children, *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support*. Furthermore, it is obvious that for many parents this is a critical feature of a school.

A few of the proposals are more balanced in this respect: the Abbotsford proposal includes a school Handbook as a sample which is exemplary in balancing student rights and responsibilities:

> ABB, student rights,
> Source Material: Every student has the RIGHT to learn.
> Every student has the RIGHT to hear and be heard.
> Every student has the RIGHT to be respected and supported.

Other proposals contain elements which balance the emphasis upon rules:

> WL, student support
> Source Material: They shall assist students to understand the purpose of goals and encourage the students to work towards them. Students shall be helped to learn how to set worthwhile goals for themselves, and to recognize that effort towards such goals is essential and satisfying.
>
> KEL, cooperation
> Source Material: Healthy competition encouraged while maintaining a spirit of cooperation and understanding.
>
> MR, cooperation
> Source Material: In conjunction, children will be encouraged to develop their skills in cooperation and team building.

My own work provides a sense of the necessary balance. In a chapter entitled "The good teacher:A student perspective" we provide the following portrait drawn from interviews: "Preferred teachers listen to students; know student needs; empathize with students; are serious about teaching, with high expectations; and help students individually." Few classrooms (in our sample) contain such teachers.

We then try to assess the reliability of the portrait with our surveys, which also allow us to identify what is important to students. Scale K (Chart B below) consists of survey questions which are strongly correlated. It represents an instructionally-oriented version of the notion of 'caring' about student welfare, similar to the 'student focused' idea in Sammons (1997).

Scale K Perception of teacher caring/respect for student T10 (5 Items) Alpha .87

.67	74. My teacher cares about how well I do in class.
.70	76. My teacher makes sure I get a chance to participate in class.
.75	78. My teacher treats me with respect in the classroom.
.75	80. My teacher makes sure everyone gets a chance to participate in class.
.67	81. My teacher treats all students fairly in class.

Options for respondents on surveys:

AGREE STRONGLY	AGREE	NOT SURE	DISAGREE	DISAGREE STRONGLY
1	2	3	4	5

CHART B: Student Perception of Teacher Caring about Individual Students

Scale B (labeled 'student values school') is primarily a measure of home influence. When put together with Scale K (Perception of Teacher Caring), our measure of school influence on student attitudes, the two scales account for 60% of the variance in the student's perception of school climate (Scale H), our measure of student commitment to school. The three scales are very good measures of student commitment to school. In turn, Scale H is by far the most important predictor of student Rating of School (our measure of student satisfaction), accounting for about 40% of the variance in that measure.

Chart C illustrates this pattern:

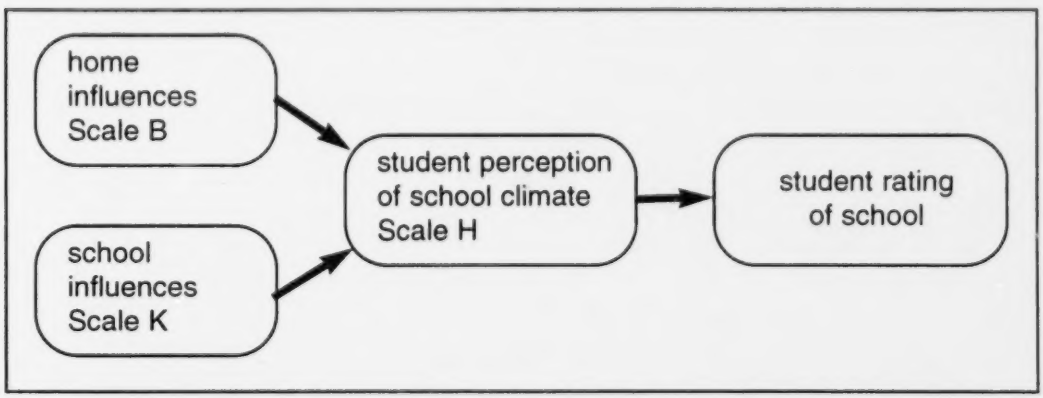
home influences Scale B
school influences Scale K
student perception of school climate Scale H
student rating of school

CHART C: Major Attitudinal Influences Upon Student Rating of School

The importance of Scale K in predicting student commitment strongly supports our portrait of the good teacher drawn from the student interviews.

This work directly supports Sammons' identification of 'student-focused' as an important element in school effectiveness. The connection between school climate issues - how students are treated in school - and test scores is a simple one, since what in my research I have called commitment has typically been called student motivation. I entirely accept Sammons' summary:

> A student-focused approach is indicative of a positive affective environment, an emphasis on the quality of staff-student relationships and enjoyment in the process of learning. It is related to higher levels of student motivation. Our results demonstrate that a student-focused approach is important for academic outcomes. (1997, p. 174)

Put another way, both Academic Press and Communitarian climate are essential to effective schools. Both 'pressure' and 'support' are needed. Pressure without support breeds rebellion (remember the movie 'If'). Support without pressure breeds apathy and lack of confidence. The proposers are more convinced of the importance of the first than of the second. They may be right. But some of the proposals do not acknowledge the need for balance in climate. I believe that will affect their ability to gain and sustain parent support.

The question which began this section was *'What would these schools add to the range of alternatives available to parents, and why would parents choose such schools?'*

In sum, for 5 of the 7 topics addressed in this section, I believe the proposals are very strong. They capture much of what is being said about the differences between ordinary schools and effective schools. There are no guarantees in education, but these schools represent a very good opportunity.

With respect to TOPIC 6: traditional methods of instruction (and associated themes), I believe the curriculum objectives aspired to by the proposers, and inherent in the Ministry curriculum guides, cannot be attained without variation in methods. It is possible that some of the proposers are not clear on this.

With respect to TOPIC 7: code of behaviour, and dress code, in my opinion some of the proposals as over-emphatic on rules. However, there is no doubt that many parents regard the public schools as too lax in this regard. Indeed, in our own research, the most common complaint of students concerns classrooms that are too noisy to work in.

Perhaps the emphasis on rules is appropriate, given a balancing emphasis on student support. I do not see this in the proposals, in general, although there are some honorable exceptions, especially Abbotsford. The school code of conduct which accompanies this proposal seems to me excellent in its balance.

CONCLUSION

CHOICE and PUBLIC POLICY

The proposals challenge public policy-makers in several ways. The dominance of educators and their unions in the policy arena is acknowledged by many scholars (Lawton, 1995); choice advocates quite properly challenge this power. But there is another dimension of the challenge posed by choice which I believe is even more important. It can be summarized in another question: "Is the primary purpose of the public schools to serve the demands of public policy, or to serve the needs of students?"

If the second part is primary, then choice becomes a central technique for improving schools. One can reasonably argue that every school should be a school of choice for the students within it, and for the parents who support it in the most basic way there is - by enrolling their students. On occasion there is no conflict between these purposes. French Immersion schools are both schools of choice, and an element in national policy on official languages.

Many countries are attempting to restructure their educational systems at the moment (Levin, 1997). The most important step in school improvement readily available to provincial governments is the introduction of a universal choice policy.

The advantages of such a step are immense: my own research suggests that they could include more satisfied parents, more committed students, and hence higher levels of achievement. To accomplish this, they need only to incorporate many of the elements in these proposals, in particular those coded as 'parent partnership' and 'parent commitment'.

What is more, the additional costs are nil. All of the proposals insist on equal operating funding per student with other schools in the district, (although some foresee some start-up costs).

Thus we may be at an historical moment - when choice becomes identified as a policy option both satisfying to families, and providing an enormous national advantage, that of gaining more accomplished and better educated students as future citizens.

APPENDIX A

PROPOSAL SITE	ABB	BURN	CHILL	COUR	FSJ	KEL	MR	NAN	NV	P/Q	RICH	SQ	SURR	WL	total
VALUES OF PROPOSERS															
School Quality															
accountable sch				2	2	6	2	4							16
*beliefs of proposers		2	2	1	2	1	9	6	5	6	3	1	1	1	40
*conditions for success	2	2		2	10	3	1	7	2	2	11	1	10	4	57
child centred practices									4	4	1				9
effective sch research				2		1	1		2	4				1	11
*goals	2	2	3	1	9	5	2	2	3	2	5		8	7	51
model used to plan	1	1	1	0	1	0	1			2			4	2	13
report results to comm	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1		1					4
school type		1	2	1	2	3	1	1		1		1	1	1	15
Choice Rationale															0
*access	1	2	2	3	8	4	2	3	1	3	6	1	5	3	44
*alternate prog	3	3	5	2	5	6	5	2	6	7	4		1	3	52
*choice		2	2	1	3	9	7	2	3	2	3	1		2	37
choices in distr						3		1	1	1			1	2	9
community buyin				1									1		2
distrust of public sch															0
*enrollment expectat	2	2	3	1	1		1	1	2	2	4	1	9	2	31
enrollment sources															0
poor schooling in Can															0
public participation						1		1		3			1		6
social values								1			1		2	4	8
															0
FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT															0
balanced curric	2	1	1	2			2	2	1	2	1	2		2	18
Board/par partnership		1	3										1		5
budget considerations						5	1	2	4	2	7		6	1	28
funding per stud	1		2	2	1			2	2	1	2				13
*governance council	1	1	3	3	6	4	1	5	2	2	3	1	8	0	40
*integral in district	2	2	4	2	8	14	1	1	4	2	7	2	3	5	57
parent advisory comm			1	1	1		1			2	3			1	10
*parent commitment	7	1	3	4	1	4	4	4	1	8	4	1		8	50
parent important		1				1	4								6
parent input	4	2	2	1		2	8	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	30
*parent partnership	11	3	2	5	5	7	5	2	2	3	5	1	5	3	59
*staff selec criteria	3	1		3	3	2	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	26
*use Ministry curric	1	1	2	2	6	5	3	3	1	2	4	1	2	1	34
*MAJOR THEME															
PROPOSAL SITE	ABB	BURN	CHILL	COUR	FSJ	KEL	MR	NAN	NV	P/Q	RICH	SQ	SURR	WL	

TABLE 2: Main Themes and the Codes Within Them

PROPOSAL SITE	ABB	BURN	CHILL	COUR	FSJ	KEL	MR	NAN	NV	P/Q	RICH	SQ	SURR	WL	total
SCHOOL-WIDE FEATURES															
Instructional															
approach to learning	1				6			1	1		2		1		12
appr to reading							1								1
*assessment	4	1	2	3	1	6	1	4	2	3	7	1	3		38
*basic skills	1	5	2	2	1	2	3	6	1	6	2	1	1	2	35
beyond basics			1			1	3				1				6
challenge for good st				1		1	1	1							4
consistency			1		1		1			1	4	1	1		10
curriculum charac		1				2							2		5
*direct instruction	1	3	3		6	4	5	7	1	2	6	1	2	1	42
eval of program											2				2
high expectations	1		1	3	1	6	0	3	1	0	2	2		1	21
*homework policy	4	2	1	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	5	1	2	2	30
mastery learning					7	4					1				12
princ role			1	2				1		2	1		9	1	17
report to parents	4	1	1	3	2	1	1	3	1	2	4				23
single grade classes	1	2	2				4		1	1				1	12
st accountability	8			3	3	1		2			2				19
st support	1		1		1	2				2	1	1		1	10
tchr centred instr		2	2		4	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	23
tchr commitment						1			1						2
*trad. method of instr	3	5	1	1	3	6	2	5	2	4	4	1	2	4	43
Climate															
*code of behaviour	17	4	3	3	3	2	3	5	3	4	8	4	2	6	67
communicate w pars															0
competition			1	1	1	4	5	1	1		1		2	1	18
cooperation						1	1								2
*dress code	3	2	3	2	2	8	5	3	1	1	3	1	2	2	38
princ role															0
selfesteem building						1	1								2
st participation	5					1	1					1			8
st rights	5														5
safe & pleasant	6	4		3	1	1				1	2	1		4	23
CLASSROOM FEATURES															
Instructional															
individual learning				1		1		1			1		2	1	7
phonics						1	2								3
routines											1				1
tch strat varied					2	3			1					1	7
tchr role	2				2	1							5	1	11
*MAJOR THEME															

TABLE 2 (cont.): Main Themes And The Codes Within Them

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